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Development Agenda : Aspirations of Governments and Citizens. Opinion Brief

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Introduction

This paper aims to identify overlapping themes of declared and practiced development objectives designated by governments and the people. The initial challenge is that on the global level citizens neither have mechanisms to express their policy preferences nor possess a direct authority to advocate them. Instead, policies of world scale are developed by experts and adopted by politicians of multilateral organisations. Later, they are introduced at country level by national governments. An alternate source of authority—global civil society—is still emerging. Its actual contours remain elusive being rather a world-wide web of interdependence.¹ Nevertheless, a genuinely global agenda has a potential to facilitate drafting and embodiment of truly universal world development goals. Such consensus politics can be put forward as an ideationally informed policy paradigm encouraging governing elites to conform to a widely shared policy agenda.² While it is difficult to find out global public opinion, it is possible to identify public opinion and official position at country level, and reveal similarities. This raises the question: what is the latent common development agenda implicitly shared by governments and citizens?

Discussion

The current research on global development agenda is incomplete. In 2014, a textual analysis of documents related to the discussion of the post-2015 development agenda³ revealed: (a) a reasonable parity between environmental, social, and economic development domains; (b) the importance of basic needs, as manifested by the themes of poverty, health, food, energy, water, security; (c) the topicality of poverty and environment as the two most important individual development issues on the agenda. Afterwards, in 2015 the United Nations⁴ put forward a comprehensive and ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs): (1) no poverty, (2) zero hunger, (3) good health and well-being, (4) quality education, (5) gender equality, (6) clean water and sanitation, (7) affordable and clean energy, (8) decent work and economic growth, (9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure, (10) reduced inequalities, (11) sustainable cities and communities, (12) responsible consumption and production, (13) climate action, (14) life below water, (15) life on land, (16) peace, justice, and strong institutions, (17) partnership for the goals (see Figure 1). But which of these are enacted as priorities? A comparison between the declared goals and real-life implementation programs is required. Furthermore, which of the development goals are shared by and pursued by citizens? The classic study⁵ demonstrated that for the last 30 years not security, but emancipative values—autonomy, equality, choice, and voice—have been on the rise in every culture zone across the globe. In addition, another research⁶ found a cyclic alteration of global conflict-oriented and cooperation-oriented civic activities for social development. These findings and related questions indicate that the available knowledge on the issue is insufficient to answer the initial question and require a special inquiry proposed here.

¹ Keane, J. (2003). *Global Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615023>

² Heffernan, R. (2002). "The Possible as the Art of Politics": Understanding Consensus Politics" *Political Studies* 50, pp. 742–760. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00005>

³ Heeks, R. (2014). "From the MDGs to the Post-2015 Agenda: Analysing Changing Development Priorities." Working paper #56, Centre for Development Informatics, University of Manchester. Retrieved from <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:220240&datastreamId=FULL-TEXT.PDF>

⁴ United Nations Development Programme. (2019). "Sustainable Development Goals." Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

⁵ Welzel, C. (2013). *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540919>

⁶ Khutkyy, D. (2017). "Social Development or Social Crisis: Modernization Theory versus World-Systems Analysis." Working paper, Working paper #WP BRP 72/SOC/2017, LCSR, NRU HSE. Retrieved from <https://www.hse.ru/data/2017/03/06/1166667755/72SOC2017.pdf>



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Methodology

To answer the question about the latent common development agenda implicitly shared governments and citizens, this study foresees the following aims: (1) to identify development goals as defined by governments and citizens; (2) to find out actually pursued development objectives; (3) to compare the declared and implemented objectives; (4) to identify a cross-cutting development agenda within selected countries.

Regarding methodology, the study has been performed by: (a) document analysis—scrutinising declared missions and realised activities as presented in government reports to identify their key objectives and priorities; (b) quantitative data analysis—to analyse national surveys and calculate prevailing development attitudes as well as to inspect global social participation data to reveal actually pursued goals. Regarding data sources for this study, it utilised: (i) voluntary national reviews provided by governments; (ii) datasets of Pew Research Centre Global Attitudes and Trends International Survey, as well as (iii) global e-petitioning data of Change.org database.

To process the data, the following methods of data analysis were employed. To comprehend the objectives of governments—qualitative content analysis of their reports to cluster strands, map themes, and rank priorities. To assess actually pursued topics and priorities—analysis of funding allocated towards each theme. To understand the values and aspirations of the people—statistical analysis of survey datasets. To conceive the prevailing goals driving civic participation—quantitative analysis of thematic distributions of actual participation via e-petitioning.

Stakeholders	Declared goals	Pursued goals
Governments	Document analysis Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) covering 2016-2017 (<i>Manual content analysis</i>)	Document analysis Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) covering 2016-2017 (<i>Manual content analysis</i>)
Citizens	Survey data analysis Pew Research Centre survey data of 2016-2017 (<i>Descriptive statistics analysis</i>)	Participation data analysis Change.org e-petitions data of 2016-2017 (<i>Descriptive statistics analysis</i>)

Table 1. The relations between stakeholders, development goals, and applied research methods

Findings

Since no country possessed sufficient data for the comparison of all the four aspects of development agenda, the analysis was performed by comparing two aspects in the countries with publicly available relevant data.

Finland's priorities (according to the voluntary national review of 2016):⁷

- 1st cluster—converging agenda (reduce inequalities);
- 2nd cluster—converging agenda (steer sustainable economy);
- 3rd cluster—converging agenda (protect environment).


	Government (declared goals)	SDGs	SDGs	Civil Society (declared goals)	SDGs	SDGs
Priority 1	Eliminate extreme poverty	SDG 1		Equal prospects for well-being	SDG 10	SDG 3
Priority 2	Reduce poverty and inequality in general	SDG 10		A participatory society for all	SDG 10	SDG 16
Priority 3	The realisation of human rights	SDG 8		Work in a sustainable way	SDG 8	
Priority 4	Sustainable development	SDG 8		Sustainable society and local communities	SDG 11	
Priority 5	Innovations, experimentation and digitalisation	SDG 9		A carbon-neutral society	SDG 13	
Priority 6	New jobs at cleantech enterprises	SDG 8	SDG 13	A resource-wise economy	SDG 12	
Priority 7	The sustainable use of natural resources	SDG 12		Lifestyles respectful of nature	SDG 12	
Priority 8	Securing environmental protection	SDG 15	SDG 14	Decision-making respectful of nature	SDG 15	SDG 14

Table 2. Finland's priorities in 2016

India's priorities (government's declared goals—VNR of 2017,⁸ citizens' declared goals—Pews survey of 2017⁹):

- 1st cluster—diverging agenda (reduce inequalities *versus* enforce the rule of law);
- 2nd cluster—diverging agenda (reduce inequalities *versus* decrease poverty and unemployment);
- 3rd cluster—converging agenda (protect environment).


	Government (declared goals)	SDGs	SDGs	Citizens (declared goals)	SDGs	% of choice
Priority 1	Universal rural electrification	SDG 7	SDG 10	Fighting terrorism	SDG 16	76%
Priority 2	Road and digital connectivity for all	SDG 9	SDG 10	Handling corrupt officials	SDG 16	74%
Priority 3	Expansion of clean and renewable energy	SDG 7		Confronting the lack of employment opportunities	SDG 8	73%
Priority 4	Sanitation and housing for all	SDG 6	SDG 10	Tackling rising prices	SDG 3	71%
Priority 5	Universal elementary school education	SDG 4	SDG 10	Promoting policies that help the poor	SDG 1	68%
Priority 6	Stakeholders are coming together	SDG 17		Guaranteeing that women have the same rights as men	SDG 5	64%
Priority 7	Reducing the emissions intensity	SDG 13		Promoting a clean environment	SDG 13	59%
Priority 8	Creating an additional carbon sink	SDG 13		Protesting police misconduct	SDG 16	56%

Table 3. India's priorities in 2017

Nigeria's priorities (citizens' declared goals—Pews survey 2016,¹⁰ citizens' pursued goals—Change.org 2016¹¹):

- 1st cluster—converging agenda (reduce inequalities, develop infrastructure, and enforce the rule of law);
- 2nd cluster—converging agenda (improve health and education);
- 3rd cluster—converging agenda (eliminate poverty).

⁷ Prime Minister's Office Finland. (2016). "National report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Finland." Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10611Finland_VNR.pdf

⁸ India. (2017). "Voluntary National Review Report on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals." Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16693India.pdf>

⁹ Pew Research Center. (2019). "Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes & Trends." Retrieved from <http://www.pewglobal.org/topics/>

¹⁰ Pew Research Center. (2019). "Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes & Trends." Retrieved from <http://www.pewglobal.org/topics/>

¹¹ Change.org. (2019). "Petitions." Retrieved from <https://www.change.org/petitions>


	Citizens (declared goals)	SDGs	% of choice	Citizens (pursued goals)	SDGs	Signatures
Priority 1	Poverty	SDG 1	93%	Peace, justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	6511
Priority 2	Energy shortages, such as electricity blackouts	SDG 7	89%	Reduced inequalities	SDG 10	326
Priority 3	Lack of employment opportunities	SDG 8	88%	Infrastructure	SDG 9	181
Priority 4	Crime	SDG 16	88%	Sustainable cities and communities	SDG 11	137
Priority 5	Government corruption	SDG 16	88%	Gender equality	SDG 5	109
Priority 6	Poor health care	SDG 3	85%	Good health and well-being	SDG 3	92
Priority 7	Poor quality public schools	SDG 4	82%	Quality education	SDG 4	72
Priority 8	Food shortages	SDG 2	81%	No poverty	SDG 1	62

Table 4. Nigeria's priorities in 2016

Albania's priorities (according to the voluntary national review covering 2016-2017):¹²

- 1st cluster—diverging agenda (strengthen institutions *versus* provide basic public services);
- 2nd cluster—converging agenda (provide public services for employment and economy);
- 3rd cluster—diverging agenda (boost economy *versus* provide basic public services).


	Government (declared goals)	SDGs	Government (pursued goals)	SDGs	Funding, mln USD
Priority 1	Public administration reform	SDG 16	Reduced inequalities	SDG 10	674.93
Priority 2	Strengthening judicial institutions	SDG 16	Good health and well-being	SDG 3	619.36
Priority 3	Increasing the fight against corruption	SDG 16	Quality education	SDG 4	604.91
Priority 4	Increasing the fight against organised crime	SDG 16	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	SDG 9	567.48
Priority 5	Ensuring the protection of human rights	SDG 16	Peace, justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	499.41
Priority 6	Innovative and citizen-centred public services	SDG 16	Decent work and economic growth	SDG 8	452
Priority 7	Recovery and consolidation of the energy sector	SDG 7	Clean water and sanitation	SDG 6	317.66
Priority 8	Fostering innovation and competitiveness	SDG 9	No poverty	SDG 1	232.61

Table 5. Albania's priorities in 2016-2017

Albania's priorities (government's declared goals—VNR,¹³ citizens' pursued goals—Change.org,¹⁴ 2016-2017)

- 1st cluster—diverging agenda (provide basic public services *versus* enforce the rule of law);
- 2nd cluster—converging agenda (boost economy and provide basic public services).


	Government (pursued goals)	SDGs	Funding, mln USD	Citizens (pursued goals)	SDGs	Signatures
Priority 1	Reduced inequalities	SDG 10	674.93	Justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	6511
Priority 2	Good health and well-being	SDG 3	619.36	Justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	326
Priority 3	Quality education	SDG 4	604.91	Justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	181
Priority 4	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	SDG 9	567.48	Justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	137
Priority 5	Peace, justice and strong institutions	SDG 16	499.41	Life on land	SDG 15	109
Priority 6	Decent work and economic growth	SDG 8	452	Industry and innovation	SDG 9	92
Priority 7	Clean water and sanitation	SDG 6	317.66	Sustainable cities and communities	SDG 11	72
Priority 8	No poverty	SDG 1	232.61	Economic growth	SDG 8	62

Table 6. Albania's priorities in 2016-2017

¹² Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2018). "Albania Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals." Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA_VNR_2018_FINAL2.pdf

¹³ Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2018). "Albania Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals." Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA_VNR_2018_FINAL2.pdf

¹⁴ Change.org. (2019). "Petitions." Retrieved from <https://www.change.org/petitions>

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that some countries have relatively aligned priorities—both within thematic clusters and between stakeholders. They can establish a better communication among stakeholders to consolidate converging priorities. However, other countries face dramatic inconsistencies among the priorities of their stakeholders. They need a deeper citizens-authorities dialogue to redesign their common development agenda. Overall, as national governments have a mandate to determine national development priorities in mid-term perspective and allocate respective funding, they are able to reflect popular aspirations in country's development goals.

Recommendations

To multilateral organisations:

- Conduct wider consultations with the general public online and offline to define development goals;
- Introduce required and recommended civic participation standards for national governments;
- Suggest stronger accountability mechanisms of implementation for national governments.

To national governments:

- Complement expert perspectives with inputs from the general public;
- Delegate part of decision-making power to the general public;
- Channel short-term developmental projects into long-term developmental investments.

To the civil society:

- Establish transnational alliances in advocating global development agenda;
- Suggest innovative and inclusive formats of deliberation and decision-making;
- Perform monitoring and control of the implementation of development policies.

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